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AUTHOR Koltai, Leslie
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ABSTRACT

For the community college administrator to achieve consistently good communication, he should follow a pattern of experimentation which includes: (1) a review of past presentations, (2) inquiry following a presentation as to what information was felt to be most valuable, and (3) reevaluate the presentation. When preparing a presentation, the administrator should consider the following questions: Why are you making the presentation? Who is the presentation being made to? What are you attempting to communicate? When should you communicate? How should you communicate? The answers to these questions will provide the key to the administrator's educational blueprint. (DB)

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"Building a Bridge of Communication"

By
Leslie Koltai
Chancellor
Los Angeles Community College District

October 1, 1974
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JC 740 439

It is a great opportunity for me to speak before you. The title of my presentation, "Building a Bridge of Communication", is significant. However, before we may begin the discussion on such a project...it is important to us to inspect the bridge of communication that exists between fellow administrators. That is why today is so important. It is on occasions such as this that community college presidents and administrators may benefit from the successes...and failures of their contemporaries.

At one time or another, we have all been guilty of filling our reports and conversations with glowing accounts of our educational achievements...carefully relegating our less stupendous endeavors to a less visible position. This is truly unfortunate in that some of man's most important progress was achieved by carefully noting what didn't work! When we talk in terms of successful communication... we must, of necessity, talk about the total picture.

As a college administrator you play many important roles. You are a writer of procedures...procedures that must be communicated. You are a planner of programs...programs that must be communicated to gain approval, support and involvement. You are a decision-maker... decisions that must be effectively communicated if they are to be

implemented. You are a coordinator of staff effort and energy... coordination that requires people understand what you want of them. You are an ambassador of goodwill in your respective communities... goodwill that must be communicated in words and action. You are asked to make recommendations to your board of trustees... recommendations that must be supported if you are to move your educational system forward.

Each of these endeavors deals with what might be your most important role: a communicator. As a professional communicator, you deal with a variety of very important "audiences"...that is, people with whom you must communicate during the course of your every day business:

*Members of your staff;

*Senior Administrators;

*A Chief Executive...or...a Board of Trustees

*Community Representatives;

*Members of the Faculty; and

*Members of your own profession in other institutions.

These are your audiences. It is your job to explain, to persuade, to inform, and to recommend. The degree to which you are successful will mark the degree to which you may move American

Education in the Community College forward.

A prerequisite to effective and efficient communication is the type of image you project to any given audience. When I say image... I am not speaking in terms of the Madison Avenue advertising image. Rather, I am talking about developing a bonafide relationship of mutual trust and respect. For instance, your board will not demonstrate a cooperative spirit if they feel you are being less than honest... nor can they be expected to act on advice that appears less than competent. To be convincing... to achieve your purpose, you must:

1. consistently demonstrate a freedom from special interests...They must trust you; and
2. produce recommendations based on thoroughly researched, comprehensive reports...They must respect you as a professional and as a leader.

We must first realize that communication is not... and cannot be an exact discipline. The process of communication sometimes can be compared with the process of education. Most of you have been classroom instructors at one time or another. You realize that each student is different... and that he will learn most effectively in various modes of study. An audience is much the

same. Each individual will understand your presentations in varying degrees according to the mode of explanation you employ. In achieving consistently good communication you should follow a pattern of experimentation.

First, review your past presentations. Which of these past communications met with the greatest success? As you appeared before the board or in administrative conferences, what phrase... what concept...what mode of communication met with the greatest and most positive response? Conversely, what met with the least success? As you write the new presentation...take note of these past experiences. Far too often, we are foolishly consistent in our communication endeavors. We must be aware of the audiences reaction...and ready to modify.

Second, after you have made the presentation...inquire regarding what information was felt most valuable. What should have been amplified...What information should have been supplied that wasn't?

Third, when you return to your office...re-evaluate the presentation. Each person is viewing your ideas through a different frame of reference. As such, you will have to evaluate the presentation on the basis of what they understood...what

they thought was important...what they considered to be the key element. You probably understood the presentation perfectly. In your eyes it was perfectly logical...perhaps even obvious. I have one key piece of advice: DON'T COUNT ON IT. People understand...conceptualize...according to their past experiences and their present circumstance. Since this is very often different from your own...it is necessary to take time...to step aside...and to view things as each individual audience does.

I am reminded of a failure in communication that I once observed in one of the college's libraries. There was this sign... very neatly printed...hanging on the inside of one of the library's back doors. It read:

EMERGENCY EXIT ONLY

NOT TO BE USED UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCE!!

I am sure that the individual who lettered that sign knew exactly what he wanted to say...and although the message was generally understood...its clarity was certainly subject to question.

Another such example exists in the personnel manual of a bureaucracy...which will remain un-named. It is a section regarding resignations. It reads as follows:

"If an employee should resign while enjoying the

benefits of sick leave, there will be a mandatory period of two weeks before the resignation will become final.

If an employee should die while enjoying the benefits of sick leave, then the mandatory two-week period will be waived and the resignation would be considered to be final."

Once again, I am sure that the people writing the requirements of this personnel manual were totally secure as to the effectiveness of their communication. However, such a statement mitigates the seriousness with which an individual will view the rest of the document.

When we are preparing to advocate a particular idea or course of action...there are a number of questions we should ask ourselves as we develop the communication:

1. Why are we making the presentation?
2. Who are we making the presentation to?
3. What are we attempting to communicate?
4. When should we communicate?
5. How should we communicate?

These questions should be carefully considered and applied to

each individual situation. The answers to these questions will vary from issue to issue. Allow me to explain:

Why are we making the presentation? ...or perhaps more precisely, what reaction do you wish to evoke from your audience? Is it an informative report...or a report for which action is required? It is amazing the number of reports that begin and end with no apparent direction. State the purpose of your communication and lead the audience to your conclusion. This question has particular importance when addressing your Board of Trustees.

Why you are communicating with the board also has to do with the attitude you hold about the board. I have met many college presidents who considered their governing board a sort of opposition. They would communicate with the board only because it was a fiscal necessity. This created tension on both sides and would close effective channels of communication.

College governance by the way is...or should be based on the principle of shared authority. There is no place for anything but complete cooperation and trust. This is the basis of any good partnership agreement. This is the basis of effective communication. It must be realized that the board

is responsible for representing the needs of society. They cannot delegate the responsibility for educational policies and practices in terms of society's needs. They are the final authority...and they are the source of whatever authority we exercise. The advice of the board must be accepted graciously...not merely adhered to in a grudging manner.

This leads me to the next question: Who are we making the presentation to? You must begin to view your audience as individuals...individuals with different likes and dislikes... varying political philosophies...specialized interests...differing prides and prejudices. What I am really talking about is creating a feeling of empathy. There are some basic principles you should keep in mind, for example:

1. Recognize that every person has his own personal, unique, individual filter through which he or she perceives reality. It is made up of attitudes, prejudices, and countless experiences.

2. Be willing to allow each person the right to be himself and to see reality in his own way. This doesn't mean you should necessarily like his point of view - just that you

do not insist that the whole audience think exactly as you do.

3. Only to the degree that the first two steps have been taken can an administrator proceed to put himself in the audience's shoes and see how the problem looks from there. Of course this can never be done perfectly because we can never completely set aside our own point of view. But the entire process of communication can only be strengthened and enriched to the degree that those communicating do grasp or understand the various elements of the decision-making process of which they are part of. Empathy does not involve acceptance of the audience's viewpoint... but the development of an increased understanding of the way that the individual is seeing the situation.

This is the key element in any communication endeavor. You cannot explain...persuage...or otherwise communicate unless you have an understanding of the total audience and the individual members' interests, attitudes and character. This is all part of effectively analyzing your audience.

The next area with which we must deal demands that we establish WHAT WE ARE ATTEMPTING TO COMMUNICATE. Many presentations fall short in that they do not clearly

define the subject matter to be dealt with. There are times when an administrator...in an effort to be complete...will dump into his presentation every bit of minutia he can dig up. Then so as not to be pushie...won't draw any conclusions or provide any kind of a summary. The effect of these good intentions is usually disaster.

You must provide your audiences with information from which they can make a viable decision. You must provide the framework and analysis. In terms of a Board of Trustees, they are counting on your expertise...and your recommendations. They do not have the staff or the time to perform your job for you.

There is, of course, the other side of the coin. There is a type of communicator who will provide nothing but his opinion in summary or recommendation form. This too is less that satisfactory. To find the proper balance will require experimentation on your part. Audience...each individual will require something slightly different. Make it your business to find out what those information parameters are. Only then can you display your case most efficiently.

The next question on the agenda: WHEN SHOULD WE COMMUNICATE? Far too often, an attempt is made to communicate only when something is wrong...or when something is needed. At times such as this,

people feel pressured by the immediacy of the claims being made. Under such pressure, personalities flare and a decision will be delayed...or...unwisely made.

This can be avoided simply by keeping the board and the people you work with posted as to your activities. Then if an emergency does occur...people are likely to feel more cooperative in that they have not been shut-out from your district's activities. Constant communication will also give you the opportunities necessary to find the most efficient communications route.

In multi-unit districts, one of the best ways of keeping the channels open is through your chancellor or superintendent. This individual has constant access to the board members and provides a reliable means of distributing your information. Your chancellor is also a good source of information regarding the board's disposition on any given matter. By informing him you achieve both guidance and effective communication with your board and the district administration.

The last question you must answer deals with HOW ONE SHOULD COMMUNICATE? In this age of instructional innovation...audio-visual aids...not to mention the xerox copier...I still observe people "lecturing" to an audience as if the audience was sitting on a log

and they were wearing a robe similar to Socrates. Such pre-printing press ideas must be done away with. It should be noted that a person remembers only 15% of what he hears...and 85% of what he sees. THERE IS A MESSAGE HERE!!!!

Back up your presentations with slides, charts, video-tapes, hand-outs, over-head projections, demonstrations...anything that will bring your idea to life. You have the means at your disposal... make use of them.

To make sure I am not accused of not practicing what I preach... I have for you a variety of printed materials from our district: (explain folder)

In summary, in my statements today has been the need for extensive preparation. Yours is a very difficult job...for you must transform the abstract into the real...the idea into the implemented, function program.

Follow your intuition when constructing the educational programs of the future...but communicate that idea after logically asking yourself:

1. Why am I making this presentation;
2. Who am I making this presentation to;

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3. What am I attempting to communicate;
4. When should it be communicated; and
5. How should it be communicated.

The answers to these questions will provide the key to the unfoldment of your educational blueprint.

I will close my presentation with a few quotations from Stuart Marsee, President-Superintendent of El Camino College. It sums up many of the "joys" of being a college administrator... the difficulty of communicating:

If he forms a committee, he can't make decisions; if not he is dictatorial.

If he writes a bulletin, he is trying to hoodwink the faculty; if not, his communications are poor.

If he prints a bulletin, it is a slick publication and an extravagance; if it is mimeographed, it is amateurish. He wonders if it is read in either case.

If he visits classes and committee meetings, he is an intruder; if he doesn't, he is not interested.

If he is popular with the community and the Board, he is a politician; if not, he has poor public relations.

Gentlemen... like so many of your other duties, communication is never an easy task... it is only necessary.